

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

Department of Aging, Disabilities and Independent Living
Agency of Human Services

2008

Needs Assessment for Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind

In the Spring of 2007, the director of Vermont's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Carrie Foster, convened an informal Task Force to assess the needs of individuals who are Deaf-Blind and to find ways to address gaps in services.

Deaf-Blind Task Force Members

Carrie Foster

Director
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, DAIL

Scott Langley

Blind Services Program Chief
Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Rene Pellerin

Northern VT Resource Center Coordinator
VT Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Will Pendlebury

Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

The group included representatives of the major agencies serving this population. In addition, several members are Deaf-Blind, and can draw on their experiences as both consumers and providers of services used by Deaf-Blind individuals.

The group decided to hold a Needs Assessment Forum that would offer an opportunity for individuals who are Deaf-Blind to openly express their needs and concerns in a fully accessible environment.

Forum. About 15 Deaf-Blind individuals across Vermont were known to the Task Force. All were invited to attend the Needs Assessment Forum held on June 9th at the Central Vermont Medical Center in Berlin, Vermont. Seven Deaf-Blind individuals were able to attend. Interpreters, tactile interpreters, transportation and lunch were provided. René Pellerin led the discussion and took notes on the needs and areas of concern that were discussed by participants.

Survey. One of the recommendations of Forum participants was to send the survey to those individuals who were unable to attend the Needs Assessment Forum. Accordingly, Carrie Foster developed a survey that picked up on the themes identified in the focus group discussion. These themes included:

- **training** needed for mobility, independent living, and communication skills,
- **assistive technology** needed for communication and alerting devices, and
- **awareness** of agencies and resources serving individuals who are Deaf-Blind.

Priority Needs Identified for Deaf-Blind

Specialized Support Providers (SSP)

Centralized system for training and coordinating personnel to provide specialized support to individuals with Deaf-Blindness. An SSP can help with communication, shopping, banking, transportation—thus promoting greater independence while alleviating the stress on family members.

Access to 911 Emergency Services

Emergency Assistive Devices for deaf-blind individuals to alert 911 and other services for help in emergency situations, and improved information for elderly deaf-blind individuals on using 911 for emergencies.

Trained Service Providers

Communication skills (including ASL) and sensitivity training for a range of providers—rehabilitation teachers, job coaches, counselors, etc—to improve services to and communication with deaf-blind individuals.

Training for Deaf-Blind Individuals

In addition to standard training for mobility, independent living, and communication skills, deaf-blind individuals need training on how to access information resources and advocate for themselves to identify and have their needs met.

Financial Resources for Technology

Financial assistance for assistive technology devices, particularly high cost items such as TeleBraille, and for commonly needed items—large print TTY, Pocket Talker, amplified phones and alarm clocks, vibrating and flashing alarm clocks and alert systems, doorbells with flashers, phone signalers.

Infrastructure for Independence

Access to legitimate work-at-home opportunities.
Accessible information resources.
Improved transportation resources.

Five individuals completed the survey. In all, twelve of the fifteen known individuals with Deaf-Blindness participated in the needs assessment via the forum or survey. Participants spanned the age spectrum from the 20s to 60s and included both men and women, people working full-time, part-time, or not at all, and both those communicating orally or primarily through American Sign Language.

Findings. The responses from both survey and focus group participants were consistent. The top priority was establishing a coordinated system for training and matching specialized support providers to Deaf-Blind individuals to provide day-to-day assistance with independent living.

For More Info: Carrie Foster

carrie.foster@ahs.dail.state.vt
800.878.5209 (voice)
802.241.4532 (video phone)
802.241.3557 (TTY)
AIM Screen:caripraet